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AUTHOR Folger, John
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ABSTRACT

This paper raises three broad issues,each with sub-areas. First, what are the consequences of measuring and evaluating the parts of higher education that can be satisfactorily measured? What are the consequences for the parts of education that can not be measured, and for the total enterprise? Second, what kind of assessment systems will be best in the long run in providing incentives for higher quality, better performance, and greater innovation and flexibility? Should we attempt to incorporate the standards into the budget process, or should we emphasize program review and audit? Third, what are the appropriate roles in the process for the public, legislators, state higher education agencies, governing boards, and institutional administrators, faculty, and students? Can we devise a set of relationships that leave the central responsibility for the educational program with the educational institutions, but provides for appropriate consideration and input from the other concerned groups? What is appropriate concern and input? These questions have a new urgency today, because higher education is being influenced by internal and external pressures that are likely to produce incomplete and unsatisfactory answers. (Author/MSE)

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WHO WANTS OUTCOME MEASURES AND WHY DO THEY WANT THEM?

John Folger

Director
Project on Evaluation & Improvement
of Planning in Postsecondary Education
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

Presented at the Invitational Seminar
on "Innovation, Outcomes, and the State Budgeting Process"

San Diego, California
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Educators, legislators, and other government officials have a high level of interest in the topics of performance budgeting and performance audits in education. A recent priority rating of the importance of 21 current educational topics by ECS commissioners, ranked educational finance first, the effectiveness of basic education second, and educational accountability fourth in importance.[1] Since ECS commissioners include a broad representation of legislators and governors, as well as educators at all levels, this high ranking of topics that are central to performance budgeting is a useful barometer of the wider climate of opinion.

This paper is in two sections. The first reviews some of the reasons for the increased interest in performance budgeting and performance auditing, and the second reviews some of the issues for discussion and resolution in anticipation of further efforts in relating both budgeting and auditing to the outcomes of education.

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[1]Unpublished rankings of educational priorities by ECS commissioners

Since this field is full of ill-defined terms and code words, it may be well to begin with a couple of definitions, so that you know what I mean by these terms. A performance or outcome budget is one that includes some part of the funding on the basis of the quality and outcomes of the activity, rather than being based solely on the quantity of activity, or on historical levels of support. A program budget only becomes a performance budget when its funding is related to the program quality or outcomes -- just classifying costs by programs doesn't make a performance budget. A performance audit is an assessment of the effectiveness of an educational program or institution. It is more than a management audit, which deals with questions of efficiency. A performance audit is also concerned with outcomes and the effectiveness of goal achievement.

I

Who's Interested in Performance Budgeting and Performance Auditing, and Why?

It will be useful to divide the question above into two parts. The first will deal with the external pressures for better outcome measures, and the second part will try to identify those influences within education that are interested in performance measures.

A major external factor is the new environment within which postsecondary education, as well as other social institutions, operates today. There are several characteristics of the new environment.

Public opinion polls have charted the general decline of public confidence in the effectiveness of all of our social institutions; health care, legislatures, the public schools, and higher education. The public is less sure of the ability of the various institutions to carry out their responsibilities, whether

it be to make laws, educate children, control crime, or cure mental illness. While education still receives relatively nigh marks as compared with other social institutions, the public concern and skepticism affects all institutions. It also makes the legislature more skeptical and critical; part of their job today is to demonstrate to the public they too are concerned, and that they are making laws and taking steps to see that the public institutions shape up, don't waste money, and provide better public services.

In this country we have had a theory of separation of powers between the three branches of government and between government in general and certain key institutions such as the press and education. This is based on the widely held belief that the content of education and communication must not be controlled by the government in a democracy.

The legislature has the task of getting higher education to do a more effective job, and to raise the level of public confidence in the educational process, in a situation where their historic relationship with education has been indirect and mediated through lay boards with considerable autonomy in the public sector, and with almost complete autonomy in the independent sector.

Thus one might expect that the legislature's approach to getting postsecondary education to do a better job would be different from the approach that they use with the Department of Corrections or the Welfare Department. However, there seems to be an increasing inclination to treat public and higher education like other parts of state government. This tendency is related to another public attitude, that the autonomy enjoyed by doctors, professors, and other professionals has been used more to the benefit of the professional group than of the public generally. Combined with the egalitarian trend the legislative and governmental skepticism about self-regulated professional groups leads to a legislative and executive position that what is good enough for the highway department, insofar

as being accountable for the effectiveness of their work, is also good enough for the colleges and universities.

Another reason for an interest in accountability and outcome measures is the increasing size of the higher education budget. The percent of the state budget devoted to higher education approximately doubled between 1960 and 1973.[2] In addition, the legislature has more discretion about appropriations to higher education than to many other governmental functions, which may be determined statutorily or be heavily influenced by federal regulations and matching fund requirements. Thus, higher education funding is larger and more visible today than it was a decade ago, and it is subject to more executive and legislative discretion; both in expanding it when it is popular and when state revenues are growing, and in contracting it when popularity decreases or state revenues are declining.

Finally, a key environmental factor in the last two years has been the continuation of recession and inflation which has made a reexamination of priorities in all areas of the state budget necessary, and has made it necessary for executive budget offices and legislative budget committees to require new evidence of efficiency and effectiveness. "Trimming the fat out" has become more than rhetoric in most states in the last couple of years.

Goal-Oriented Budget Reform.

Another external influence on educational outcome measurement has been the budget reform movement. The weaknesses and limitations of historical-incremental budgeting have been recognized for a long time, and beginning with the early sixties a number of new approaches to budgeting were proposed. While these had

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[2]Glenny and Kidder, State Tax Support and Higher Education 1963-73 ECS, April 1974.

a variety of names, such as PPBS, Zero-Based Budgets, Management by Objectives, Program budgeting, etc., most of them were based on relating budgets and expenditures to specific objectives or goals. The theory was that by requiring clear identification of goals it should be possible to relate decisionmaking and expenditures to them, and made the budget a much more effective planning and management tool.

Goal-oriented budget systems assume that goals can be identified clearly, that expenditures can be related to them, and that progress toward the goals can be assessed either objectively, or by some agreed upon subjective procedure. It has been difficult to fit these assumptions to some of our social institutions, including education.

A number of states have adopted program-budgeting, PPBS, or some other variant on them, but in general, these changes have had a very limited impact on higher education. While institutions in states that have adopted program budgeting have made changes in the budget format, and have identified programs, and allocated costs to them, the impact on the planning, decisionmaking, and resource allocation methods of colleges and universities has generally been limited. There has been more change in the form of the budget than in the substance or the process by which it is developed and evaluated.

Why, if all of the environmental changes described above have been taking place, hasn't budget reform had more impact on higher education? The answer to this question will be explored in more detail in the second half of this paper where the issues for the future are examined. However, higher education institutions have multiple and general, rather than specific goals, and universities are more confederations of individual professionals, each setting their own priorities, than hierarchical organizations with simple goals. The organization doesn't fit

the assumptions of the budget system very well, although both MBO and program budgeting systems accommodate to individual and sub-unit goals. Despite the limited impact of program budgeting in most states, a few states, most notably Hawaii, have emphasized program budgeting which includes outcome measures and assessment of progress toward objectives.

Accountability

Another external influence has been the growth of the accountability movement. As public higher education budgets have grown, and particularly in the recent turndown in the economy and in tax collections, there has been an increased gubernatorial and legislative concern with the efficiency of all state activities, including educational institutions. State auditing activities have been expanding from fiscal audits to include management audits, and from the management audit, it is only another step to the performance audit, which examines outcomes and the effectiveness of programs. The Federal General Accounting Office has been involved in performance audits for some time, and an increasing number of states have begun to carry out performance audits. Performance auditing has been concentrated in the larger states, with better developed audit staffs, but is spreading to a number of medium sized and smaller states.

Auditing is not the major approach to increased efficiency. Several state legislatures have sought to impose more efficiency, by mandating heavier teaching loads, year-round calendars, better use of space, etc., as a part of the budget process. A more common approach, however, is for the legislative or executive budget process to simply cut the budget back across the board, leaving to the affected institutions the problem of where to make their operation more efficient. As far as I know, none of these external pressures for more efficiency has tried to use any effectiveness criteria or outcome measures as a way to reduce the

budget, or to examine in any systematic way what the impact of budget cuts was on the effectiveness of operations.

Across the board budget cuts are politically expedient, both within the institution, as well as on the part of the executive and the legislature, if the assumption is that the fiscal set-backs are temporary. Frank Bowen's study of states where higher education budgets have been cut shows that when institutions think financial difficulties are likely to continue for a considerable number of years, they then begin to look for ways to make selective reductions, and to consider qualitative issues, as revealed by the New York and Wisconsin program review processes. Fiscal retrenchment has generated a climate conducive to the development of efficiency measures, and this same executive and legislative concern creates an interest in effectiveness measures.

At the elementary and secondary level, the Cooperative Accountability Project has kept track of legislation relating to accountability[3], and in their most recent report identified 31 states that had enacted some sort of accountability legislation. Their definition of accountability legislation is quite broad, and includes such things as establishing a uniform accounting system, doing comprehensive planning, and setting up a management information system. There are twenty three states that have enacted legislation to create, at the elementary-secondary level one or more of the following: A system of program evaluation, competency based teacher certification, and/or formal assessment of student achievement. It thus appears that about half the legislatures have mandated development of some form of outcome measures in elementary-secondary education. Just how these efforts will be related to the budget process is not clear, but it is evident that there is a lot of interest in performance outcomes as a part of accountability.

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[3]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education, State Education Accountability Repository, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1976

These external influences on the development of performance budgets and performance audits haven't resulted in many tangible outcomes yet in higher education, but they seem quite likely to in the future. They are getting reinforcement from some sources within postsecondary education, which will be reviewed in the next section.

Innovative Programs and Performance Criteria

There are several influences within higher education that are concerned with performance criteria. One of the most important of these is the administration of nontraditional and innovative programs. These programs can't be easily equated to traditional credit-hour measures. Nontraditional programs need some performance standard to demonstrate the equivalence of their programs with regular on-campus programs, and this is especially true of those programs conducted entirely off-campus and/or without contract with regular faculty. Thus a variety of innovative programs need performance criteria to validate the quality of the educational experiences they provide. Often outcome measures are the only evidence they have -- since their programs don't meet the usual criteria of time or faculty contact. The problem is that regular programs don't usually have comparable outcome measures, so the innovators also become a major lobby for performance measures that will be used across the board. Innovators are often concerned that their programs won't be funded adequately through the usual credit-hour oriented formulas used by many states, and thus the introduction of performance criteria seems to hold out the possibility of more adequate funding.[4]

Research -- An Example of Performance Funding

In one area, the funding of research in universities, performance criteria have been widely used in deciding on funding for projects and programs.

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[4] L. Richard Meeth. Government Funding Policies and Nontraditional Programs Washington, D. C., Institute for Educational Leadership. June, 1975

Fund requests are usually reviewed in detail by peers in the same field, and are awarded in competition with other research projects. The results are also reviewed, and reports from research are generally refereed before being published. Ineffective performance is likely to lead to no new grants, and if bad enough, to termination of existing grants. A majority of research funding in universities is provided through competitive awards, which attempt to assess by a variety of objective and judgmental procedures, the potential effectiveness of the proposed research. Research is at least as complex a process as teaching and may be even harder to assess for funding purposes. But in this broad area of university activity we have a performance-oriented funding system that assesses outputs and judges the quality of very complex tasks, even though research has objectives that are often quite vague. Research funding is of course not usually a part of the "regular" budget, although the regularity of funding of research has been pretty high, when considered for the total national support of research in universities.

Stable funding of the university's general fund budget makes the competitive performance-oriented funding of research easier, by assuring the researcher of a base of support, through his teaching, but in theory a similar system could be extended to the teaching as well as the research budget. The sociologist Theodore Caplow proposed to an institutional research conference about 20 years ago that teaching be budgeted on a performance contract basis similar to the research grant, but this idea is notable primarily because it has had almost no impact on educational budgeting up to this point. In view of the obvious parallels between research and teaching, the key question is why haven't people tried the same funding approach in teaching that they have in research?

Program Evaluation and Outcome Measures Within the Institution

Another source of interest in assessment and outcome measures within higher education are the administrators of institutions who are anticipating a long-term requirement for strict budgetary controls, and reallocation of resources from one program area to another. The Wisconsin System has initiated a process of planning and program review which is designed to assess the effectiveness of programs, as a basis for budgeting decisions to cut back, maintain, or expand the programs.[5] A number of private institutions have initiated internal budget processes which require schools within the university to do long range budgeting in relation to specific outcome objectives. Where the prospects for fiscal stringency are long term, the internal response in a number of institutions is likely to be an assessment process that utilizes outcome measures, and which evaluates programs against performance criteria.

Student Pressures for Performance Evaluation

In the past, the large majority of students have expressed general satisfaction with their education, and by their continued enrollment have provided a kind of "bottom line" assessment of education. The rise of programs of student assistance to increase student access and choice of educational options has also raised questions about the adequacy of information to students on which they can make informed choices. Inevitably, this gets into information about the outcomes and effectiveness of the programs that the students are choosing. In the future, there are likely to be greater requirements for information about outcomes as part of the consumer protection, student information for choice emphasis in postsecondary education.

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[5]Don K. Smith "Academic Program Audit and Review as a Means of Resource Reallocation," Education Commission of the States, IEP Seminar, December 16, 1975.

Accreditation and Outcome Budgeting

The regional accreditation process turned away from the use of objective criteria (such as minimum faculty salaries, minimum expenditures per student, etc.) as a major basis for accreditation fifteen or twenty years ago, and substituted a self-evaluation process, in which each institution was to be judged against its own goals and objectives. Judgments were largely subjective evaluations of the processes being followed, rather than the outcomes being achieved. The process was largely internal and confidential, with only the final result being made public. Accreditation in general does not seem to have been a very important influence leading to the development of outcome measures or performance audits. It has concentrated on the processes being followed, rather than on the results being achieved. Although it is in the nature of an audit, the internal and confidential nature of the process is such that it doesn't satisfy external pressures for public performance audits, nor have accreditation results been a significant part of budget processes, except in the case of medical education, where they are essential to the release of federal funds.

The preceding review has identified a number of internal to education and external influences that are likely to cause more emphasis on both performance audits and on the use of outcome measures in education. What are some of the issues created by these developments, which should be of concern to educators, state higher education executives, budget officers, gubernatorial staff, and legislators? The next section focuses on these questions.

II

Issues in the Development of Performance Audits and/or Performance Budgets

A first question to be considered is whether we can do an effective job of assessing the important objectives in education. Educators have long been skeptical

about the possibility of developing objective measures of the complex processes of education that will not distort it, or lead to overemphasis on the part that can be measured, to the detriment of the parts (possibly more important) that can't be measured.

It is not only the question of what outcomes can be measured, but also the question of how we should approach the whole process of evaluation. Even if we have a series of test scores of the graduates of all the programs, the outcomes of education are more than the sum of those scores. Does our approach to assessment take account of this additional complexity? As Bob Pace observed:

> "If (we)...are to deal effectively with large problems such as the effectiveness of a total institution, of a class of institution, or of higher education in the United States -- then we need a concept of evaluation that is both more comprehensive and more flexible than the familiar experimental model. For this level of complexity and reality, the evaluator must ask different questions, proceed in a different style..."[6]

Pace goes on to say that evaluation of complex organizations must be concerned not only with intended outcomes, but with the other consequences, that it must not attempt to reduce everything to a few simple measures. He also favors a separation of the evaluative function from the direct responsibilities for management or operations.

This suggests that the introduction of outcome measures into the budget process will create ripples which extend beyond the area where the outcomes are being assessed. The case of funding research on the basis of competitive proposals in which outcomes are emphasized illustrates this very well. Research funds also provide employment for graduate students and have been a very powerful stimulant for the expansion of graduate programs, which in turn require expansion of the regular university instructional budget for salaries, equipment, space etc.

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[6]C. Robert Pace, Thoughts on Evaluation in Education. American College Testing

A complex chain of interdependent organizational effects is set in motion by change in one part of the organization.

The issue is what the consequences will be for the total educational process if we only measure a few of the outcomes of education. Will a university that is successful in performance competition for research funds overemphasize graduate education and neglect undergraduate teaching? The usual answer to that question is "no" by university faculty and "yes" by outsiders. Will undergraduates be attracted to a graduate university by the prestige of the faculty and will they get a better education than at a strictly undergraduate institution. There are a lot of undergraduates who think so, but it's hard to assess those other consequences by the usual approach to measuring performance.

If we wait until we can measure all the important outcomes of education and all the consequences of change in one part of the organization for other parts of the organization, then we will never introduce performance budgeting. It is also clear that changing the criteria for determining part of the budget will have consequences for other parts of the budget.

Should we move ahead with efforts to use such outcome measures as are available, recognizing that this will be a limited assessment of the total outcomes of the institution, and recognizing that a change in the funding pattern of one part of the institution can have unintended, but major, consequences for some other part of the organization? Or do we try to develop some more global form of institutional assessment? Or do we continue to argue that the costs are greater than benefits, and try to avoid outcome measures entirely?

An answer to these questions depends on how you assess the advantages and disadvantages, and I hope you will try to answer those questions for yourself at this conference.

Performance Budgeting or Performance Auditing?

Changing the budget process to include outcome measures may have different consequences for institutional management and for institutional autonomy than will the response to a performance post audit. The obvious analogy is between the impact of a fiscal post audit, and the introduction of additional line item controls in a budget process. Most people would agree that the introduction of more line item controls limits autonomy and managerial flexibility more than adherence to post audit standards, and the first response is likely to be that the post audit is preferable.

The issue is more complex, however. Suppose performance criteria were introduced into the budget in the form of incentive grants -- much as they have been in research. Few would argue that the research contract and grant system unduly limits institutional autonomy, since the institution is free not to submit an application if they think the terms of the grant are bad or the kind of work is inappropriate. If an institution wants to be a major graduate university, however, it must apply for some grants, and once you have the grant habit, it is very difficult to give it up.

Fiscal audit standards impose a number of restrictions on managerial flexibility. They are not generally regarded as threats to autonomy, because we think the standards are reasonable and desirable, and because the institutions know what standards will be applied. This is not the case with performance audits. The standards or criteria which should be met are not a matter of consensus. What is to be assessed, how it will be assessed, who will assess it, and what the budgetary consequences should be are all matters of disagreement. You can test that statement by raising the issues in a mixed audience of legislators, state fiscal officials, college administrators and faculty if you don't believe it. As a consequence, a performance audit may be viewed by the institution as improper

and unwarranted intrusion on the legal authority and responsibility of the institution to manage the educational program. At the same time it may be seen by the legislature as a necessary step in more effective public policy determination. A case in point is the recent controversy between the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin legislature over a proposed audit by the latter agency.

When you think about the potential impact of performance budgeting or performance auditing, both will affect institutional management, and will affect managerial autonomy. The way in which the processes are carried out, who carries them out, and the standards or criteria that are used will be far more important than whether we apply those performance standards on the front end, through the budget process, or after the fact, with an audit. Actually it is likely to be performance budgeting and performance auditing, for if the standards are applied in the budget process, the audit process must look to see if they have actually been applied properly.

Who Should Determine the Performance Standards and How should the Process Operate?

Self-evaluation through voluntary accreditation has been the traditional way that institutions have sought to validate the quality of their efforts. The emphasis in accreditation has been on elimination of the very weak or fradulent institutions, and the encouragement of other institutions to improve themselves by establishing goals, and conducting self studies to see how they measure up to their own objectives. Most educators favor continuation of this self-regulating system as being most consistent with the maintenance of institutional control of the educational process.

The process has been criticized in recent years because it doesn't provide for input to goal setting and standards from the public, is ineffective in eliminating fradulent institutions, and doesn't provide enough incentive for institutions in the average and above average quality range to improve themselves.

The performance audit function raises the clear issue as to who should do it? Can an internal audit meet the needs of the public and of legislators who are concerned about the way that public funds are being used? Can an educational agency external to the institutions such as a state coordinating agency, or a state or federal licensing and approval agency perform the function? Or can the regular state audit agency, with appropriate staff supplementation, perform the function? What are the consequences if the responsibility is located outside the audit agency?

If we want to talk about performance budgeting, then the same issue arises? Who sets the performance standards and criteria that will be used in the budget process? The peer review system in research grants and contracts has weaknesses too, which have been discussed at length, but it is essentially an external group of educators who make evaluations and set standards. But even though the standards for research review and evaluation are developed by educators, they are often applied within fairly narrow legal and administrative regulation boundaries, which greatly delimit the area in which educational evaluations can be made.

The issues of who should be involved in the development of the standards for both performance budgets and performance audits is an important one which I hope you will discuss.

Summary

This paper raises three broad issues, each with sub-areas.

First, what are the consequences of measuring and evaluating the parts of higher education that can be satisfactorily measured? What are the consequences for the parts of education that can't be measured, and for the total enterprise?

Second, what kind of assessment systems will be best in the long run in providing incentives for higher quality, better performance, and greater innovation

and flexibility? Should we attempt to incorporate the standards into the budget process, or should we emphasize program review and audit?

Third, what are the appropriate roles in the process for the public, legislators, state higher education agencies, governing boards, and institutional administrators, faculty, and students? Can we devise a set of relationships that leave the central responsibility for the educational program with the educational institutions, but provides for appropriate consideration and input from the other concerned groups? What is appropriate concern and input?

These questions aren't new. In one form or another they have been discussed for a long time. But they have a new urgency today, because environmental influences are pressing on higher education which are likely to produce incomplete and unsatisfactory answers. Assessments, and budget procedures are likely to emphasize efficiency rather than effectiveness; and cheapness rather than return per dollar invested, and concern for quality for the youth of America. I hope that this conference can help to assure a broader consideration of the important policy issues that are involved in stimulating innovation and desirable outcomes through the budget process.

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